A Sermon for the Feast of St Luke

Before I move on to the Gospel passage and comment on today's feast day, I wish to make a couple of remarks about the content of the passage of the second letter to Timothy. In it, we see Paul in one of his very human moments. He laments that his followers have gone their various ways to other cities, declaring "only Luke is with me". He even decries Alexander the coppersmith, and warns others against him, but ends on the hopeful note that "the Lord stood by me and gave me strength". These moments remind us of Paul's humanity, but also that these letters were personal communications that had both a significant theological letter, but were also used to share more commonplace news and requests.

As a favour, he even asks for his cloak, his books, "and above all the parchments", hoping Timothy will bring them to him when he travels to meet him once more. I think this is a charming insight into his daily life and the things he had around him and considered valuable and necessary. Paul, a scholar, needs his valued books and parchments, objects that were precious in those ancient times. It also gives an insight into how little the disciples might have carried with them, and such a request truly means that these things were important, and meaningful.

Yet I have briefly digressed … However fleetingly he featured in Paul's comments, today we celebrate the life and witness of St Luke – evangelist and martyr. Often considered a physician, his Gospel is often characterised as the "social justice" Gospel for its lessons that emphasise compassion and healing. Luke not only wrote a Gospel account of Jesus' life and death, but he also wrote the account of the early disciples, the Acts of the Apostles, telling of their work spreading the good news of Jesus as they were commanded to do.

The Gospel passage gives us a vision of the early disciples going about their own ministries and being commissioned for their work. Jesus appoints seventy of them and sends them out, two by two. He sends them out encouraged, but also understanding that the work is difficult. "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few," Jesus says. He wants them to go and spread the word, knowing that there is always more work to be done that they could do, but it is worth doing.

He warns them that they won't always be positively received, "I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves", he warns, but there is hope. They will be

provided for. This is why he tells them to travel simply, taking only what they need and receiving with grace and gratitude the support offered to them along the way.

There is an interesting lesson we might learn about life within this passage. It will not always be as we might expect it to be, but we should keep doing what we know to be right, knowing that it is the right thing to do. We will not always be thanked for our efforts, but they are ultimately worthwhile.

They are to be people of peace. Their greeting, "Peace to this house!" speaks to the peace of God in whose name they come, and the peace with which they seek to bless those they encounter. I like to think that while their mission is one of evangelism, sharing the good news, they do so peacefully, allowing people to encounter God through acts of kindness and grace, rather than through logical discussion, rhetorical conversation or debate.

So they know how they are to serve the people they meet, Jesus gives the disciples a guide as to what they ought to do, and it is to offer practical care and good news. "Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you'." They are to spend time with the people, getting to know them, receiving the hospitality they offer with grace and humility, and then being of good use to the community.

The sick need to be cared for, as do those who need comfort, consolation or assistance. This is the practical part of their commission, which is followed by the encouraging part. They are to spread the good news of God's kingdom by sharing the teachings of Jesus. Their message of neighbourly care and love is the key, and is the basis for all that they will do publicly.

My prayer is that we will all follow in Luke's footsteps. With wisdom and empathy, let us use our time, talents and abilities in the service of others. Let us share the good news of Jesus with others, allowing them to see what gives us hope, what inspires us, and what underpins our daily living.

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